

Exploration and Colonization

Mr. Jenkins

Name: _____

U. S. History

“The Problem of Slavery”

Background

The most glaring contradiction in the American system and in America’s image of itself-racism-had its origins in the colonial period. By 1690 African slavery was firmly established in all the English colonies in America, and some colonists were already agitating for its abolition.

Purpose

In this activity students will review the origins of slavery in the colonies, its role in the economy, and how the circumstances of the institution differed between northern and southern regions. The distinction between slavery and indentured servitude will be considered, as well as the concept that economic dependence on slavery and racist justification for it fed off one another. Finally, students will read an early statement of protest against slavery and consider how it might have been received in seventeenth-century America.

Objective

Students will be able to explain how the seeds of America’s longest-continuing moral and political conflict were sown in the earliest decades of American history.

Activity

Review the origins of the African slave trade and slavery in the American colonies. Be able to define and/or explain the significance of the following words and concepts:

Slavery

slave trade

African slave hunters

Middle Passage

plantation

cash crop

Discussion

- Why did Europeans believe that they were justified in enslaving Africans?
- How were slaves captured in Africa, and how were they brought to America?
- Why did slavery take root more strongly in the South than in the North? What were some of the differences between the two sections in the way slaves were treated? What was the role of northerners in maintaining the African slave trade?
- What was indentured servitude, and how did it differ from slavery? How did people become indentured servants? Why did slavery gradually replace indentured servitude in the colonies?

- Why would it have become more and more difficult to end “the peculiar institution” the longer it was established?
- What group among white populations within the colonies would have been most opposed to slavery and the slave trade, or where were the first protests against slavery?

Activity

Read the primary document provided. Within your groups, discuss and complete the following items.

- Against whom was the first protest directed?
- Summarize the reasons given by the Mennonites for their opposition to slavery.
- What do the Mennonites have to say about European reaction to the fact Quakers owning and trading in slaves?
- What is the point made in the next-to-last paragraph about Quaker masters and mistresses opposing slaves who fight for their freedom?
- Speculate about how the Mennonite resolutions might have been received by the Quakers to whom they were addressed.

❖ Discuss the following assignment within your groups, compare notes, but complete the work individually.

- ✓ Write a brief reply to the Mennonite resolutions as it might have been written by any two of the following people:
 - a) A Quaker merchant in Philadelphia who owns slave ships
 - b) The owner of a tobacco plantation in Maryland
 - c) An indentured servant in Maryland who is about to go free
 - d) An African recently brought to America on a slave ship
 - e) A former slave, born in America, who has bought his freedom